

U.S. Department of Justice

United States Attorney

Eastern District of Virginia

Paul J. McNulty
United States Attorney

2100 Jamieson Avenue (703)299-3700
Alexandria, Virginia 22314 Fax: 703-549-5202

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JULY 12, 2004

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
Sam Dibbley (703) 842-4050

Human Trafficking Task Force Announced

United States Attorney Paul J. McNulty and Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights R. Alexander Acosta announced today that their offices have formed an alliance to investigate cases of trafficking in humans in the Eastern District of Virginia. This pioneering partnership, part of a broader push by the Department of Justice and other federal agencies to target human traffickers, concentrates the resources of the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, the United States Attorney's office, United States Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, United States Department of State, Fairfax County Police Department, and other state and local law enforcement agencies on the problem of human trafficking in Virginia. The task force also will work closely with outside organizations and support groups committed to helping the victims of this terrible crime.

Human trafficking is a crime in which the victims are often forced, defrauded, or coerced into prostitution or other sexual exploitation. Other victims are forced to work in sweat shops, agriculture, or domestic servitude, essentially as modern day slaves who are paid little or nothing and may be physically and psychologically abused by their employers. The victims of this crime are nearly always new, illegal immigrants to this country, who are lured to the United States with promises of jobs, good pay and the American Dream. Once here they are held in bondage. Traffickers rely on the victims' lack of resources and contacts in the United States, their inability to speak English, their fear of law enforcement and their ignorance of their legal rights in this country to help them exploit these victims.

Human trafficking cases have been prosecuted across the United States and this task force is intended to stay ahead of this growing problem. United States Attorney Paul J. McNulty said, "This terrible crime is often hard to uncover – it's victims are frightened, they often don't even speak English, and they don't know where to turn. But we will not tolerate this kind of exploitation in northern Virginia. The task force will aggressively pursue all leads of potential human trafficking activity, in an effort to root out this crime and expose it. Where traffickers are identified, they will be prosecuted, and federal services will be made available to their victims as provided in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and related regulations."

R. Alexander Acosta, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, added, "Trafficking in humans, modern day slavery, is a stain on our democracy. Task Forces such as this combine the resources and expertise of state and local law enforcement and prosecutors, and also victims service providers, into a unified and effective tool for fighting human trafficking. We will continue to oppose vigorously this inhuman practice."

These crimes are particularly difficult to detect, and coordination with nongovernmental groups is vital to uncovering trafficking operations and helping the victims. The task force will build alliances with community groups and organizations who may be better able to identify potential trafficking victims in various immigrant communities. These groups also can provide services to traumatized victims and assist in communicating with law enforcement.

Over the last three months, collaborative anti-trafficking task forces -- involving the Department of Justice, United States Attorneys' Offices, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Health & Human Services, state and local law enforcement, and non-governmental organizations -- already have been established in Philadelphia, Atlanta, Phoenix, and Tampa. The Department expects to announce the formation of more than a dozen more task forces by the end of the year. In addition, later this month, the Department of Justice will be convening a National Conference on Human Trafficking in Tampa, Florida.

The Bush Administration has made fighting human trafficking a major priority. Since 2001, the Justice Department and United States Attorneys' Offices have charged 150 human traffickers -- a three-fold increase over the previous three years -- and secured convictions of 107 defendants -- nearly twice the number convicted during the previous three years. Over the same period, the Justice Department has initiated 308 new trafficking investigations, nearly triple the number opened in the previous three years.

Individuals who think they might have come in contact with, or have information on, possible victims of human trafficking should call the Trafficking Information and Referral Hotline at 1.888.3737.888. The operators at this hotline, which is operated 24 hours a days and all seven days of the week, will help callers determine if they have in fact encountered a victim of trafficking, will identify local resources available in the community to help victims, will help coordinate with local social service organizations, and will refer the matter to prosecutors. You can report trafficking crimes or get help by calling the Trafficking in Persons and Worker Exploitation Task Force Complaint Line at 1-888-428-7581 (voice and TTY).